



Civil Rights Department Commission on the State of Hate

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Minutes

Commission on the State of Hate

March 26, 2025, 9:00 am

Commissioners Present

Chair Brian Levin

Vice Chair Andrea Beth Damsky

Commissioner Regina Cuellar

Commissioner Cynthia Choi

Commissioner Russell Roybal

Commissioner Bamby Salcedo

Commissioner Erroll Southers

Ex Officio Members Present

Abby Browning, Ex officio member of the Commission

Civil Rights Department (CRD) Staff Present

Kevin Kish, Director

Rishi Khalsa, Deputy Director of Communications

Marquez Equalibria, Assistant Deputy Director

Alec Watts, Assistant Deputy Director

Rebecca Goodsell, Research Data Specialist

David Kalkstein, Research Data Specialist

Kevin Thomas, Research Data Specialist

Monica Chavez, Associate Governmental Program Analyst

Shilpa Ram, Assistant General Counsel

Kendra Tanacea, Attorney Mediator

Shanna Heart, Assurance & Reporting Appeals Unit Consultant

Others Present

An estimated 16 members of the public attended virtually.

I. Welcome

BRIAN LEVIN
CHAIR

ANDREA BETH DAMSKY
VICE CHAIR

CYNTHIA CHOI
COMMISSIONER

REGINA CUELLAR
COMMISSIONER

CECE FEILER
COMMISSIONER

RUSSELL ROYBAL
COMMISSIONER

BAMBY SALCEDO
COMMISSIONER

ERROLL SOUTHERS
COMMISSIONER

A. Call to Order

Chair Levin called the meeting to order at 9:00 am.

He welcomed everyone to the California Commission on the State of Hate's second meeting of the year. He shared that translated closed captioning is available for this meeting.

B. Establishment of a Quorum

Assistant Deputy Director Alec Watts conducted the roll call.

C. Review of the Agenda

Chair Levin reviewed the agenda and public comment process. He noted that Agenda Item III will go after Agenda Item IV.

Link Sent in the Chat:

https://calcivilrights.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/32/2025/03/CSH_Meeting_3.26.2025_NoticeAgenda.pdf

II. Approval of the Minutes: February 26, 2025, Commission Meeting

Commissioner Roybal moved to approve the February 26, 2025, meeting minutes; Commissioner Salcedo seconded.

Action by the Commission

Ayes: 7 (Chair Levin, Vice Chair Damsky, Commissioner Choi, Commissioner Cuellar, Commissioner Roybal, Commissioner Salcedo, Commissioner Southers)

Nays: 0

Link Sent in the Chat:

https://calcivilrights.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/32/2025/03/Attachment-A_CSH-Meeting_2.26.2025_Minutes.pdf

IV. Informational Presentation: Engaging Law and Institutional Structure: Best Practices for Enforcing Hate Crime Law

Dr. Jeannine Bell, Curt and Linda Rodin Professor of Law and Social Justice, Loyola University

Chair Levin introduced Dr. Bell.

Dr. Bell's presentation covered the following information:

- She conducted a field study with a hate crime police unit
- The unit used to be the standard for hate crime investigations, as it was the best at identifying hate crimes at the time.
- The unit utilized indicators to assess whether a crime was hate-motivated by looking at perpetrator and victim differences, the presence of hate group symbols, and the perceptions among victims and witnesses.
- Hate crime units were rare at the time of the study, with only about 6% of departments having such units in the 1990s.

Commission Discussion

Commissioner Choi asked Dr. Bell to share effective strategies to build trust with communities.

Dr. Bell described how strong relationships with community-based victim advocacy groups and the use of language interpreters by the unit she studied helped build trust

Commissioner Salcedo asked how to identify or track hate-based motivations in police use of force, particularly against marginalized individuals.

Dr. Bell suggested using a civil rights framework, rather than hate crime laws, when analyzing abuses by government officials like police officers.

Commissioner Southers shared that the LAPD is now tracking both hate crimes and hate incidents and emphasized the importance of training officers.

Commissioner Salcedo asked how to ensure asked how to ensure perpetrators are held accountable when hate motivation is hard to prove and how to work with the DA's office to align justice with community demands, expressing concern that the DA may favor law enforcement.

Dr. Bell responded that prosecuting police violence as civil rights violations is possible but requires a dedicated prosecutor's office.

Commissioner Levin emphasized the importance of community voices in the Commission's work.

Vice Chair Damsky appreciated Dr. Bell's clarity on distinctions between civil rights and hate crimes law, and her emphasis on political will.

Dr. Bell responded that there is a need to speak truthfully about failures to enforce hate crime laws.

Assistant Deputy Director Alec Watts asked for specific operational recommendations for hate crime units.

Dr. Bell recommended centralized hate crime units covering entire cities.

Rebecca Goodsell asked for advice on key components that should be included in hate crime training.

Dr. Bell responded that it's crucial that officers defer judgment to specialized hate crime units, especially when slurs are involved, because a short training isn't enough to ensure unbiased assessments.

Chair Levin asked about the feasibility of using a “bias crime liaison officer” in small departments lacking hate crime units.

Dr. Bell responded that liaison models can work if leaders are well-trained, committed, and politically brave.

Public comment

One commenter asked about anti-disability hate crime reporting and distinguishing responsibilities between first responders and specialized units.

Dr. Bell responded that law enforcement struggles with hate crime recognition unless they are trained and should refer to trained units when they need help.

Additional Commission Discussion

Commissioner Cuellar shared that tribal officers are facing jurisdictional challenges.

Kevin Thomas asked if community-led protection efforts are a viable alternative.

Dr. Bell responded that communities pay heavily for police and deserve proper protection and service in return.

III. Discussion regarding the 2024-2025 Annual Report of the Commission

Chair Levin thanked Dr. Bell and thanked staff for the annual report draft.

Assistant Deputy Director Alec Watts reviewed the report contents: (1) Introduction, (2) Patterns, Trends, and Data (3) Enhancing Resources and Support, (4) Hate Prevention and Interventions (5) Activities of the Commission, and (6) Conclusion.

Commission Discussion

Commissioner Roybal thanked staff for the report and highlighted the value of the CHIS data set for their work.

Commissioner Choi expressed concerns about the underreporting of hate crimes in some communities and elected officials platforming hate.

Chair Levin criticized actions affecting transgender service members.

Commissioner Southers thanked staff for their work on the report and offered to provide written comments later.

Commissioner Salcedo highlighted politically-generated hate, questioned what the Commission can do to protect targeted communities, and asked about potential missing information.

Chair Levin discussed a public-facing release of the report and emphasized the need to amplify community voices.

Vice Chair Damsky asked if the report included a discussion of hate on college campuses and inquired about the inclusion of related legislation.

Assistant Deputy Director Alec Watts responded that those topics were not a focus this year and welcomed feedback for future inclusion.

Vice Chair Damsky noted that the report's discussion focused on teenagers up to age 18 but didn't extend into college years.

Chair Levin suggested addressing college campus challenges and solutions in future meetings.

Director Kevin Kish pointed out that the report contains significant sections on hate prevention in schools later in the report.

Public Comment

A commenter asked about policy recommendations and submitting the report by the deadline.

Chair Levin and Vice Chair Damsky thanked everyone for their work on the report.

V. Chair and Subcommittees Updates and Discussion

a. Chair Brian Levin

- The Commission reflects on the important events that have taken place since the February meeting, including National Women's History Month and holidays.
- Provided a summary of his background and vision for the year as Chair.
- For those affected by a hate incident, support and information are available through the CA vs. Hate Resource Line and Network.
- Reviewed the services provided by the Community Conflict Resolution Unit.

- Discussed presentations from subject matter experts and community voices at future meetings.
- Reminded Commissioners they may have a representative attend the meeting if they cannot attend.

Links Sent in the Chat:

<https://www.cavshate.org/>

<https://calcivilrights.ca.gov/community-conflict-resolution-unit/>

b. Subcommittee on Patterns, Trends, and Prevention

Updates provided by Commissioner Choi:

- The findings from a partnership with UCLA are included in the report.
- There is ongoing research into preventing online and school hate; compiling information on offender motivations and deprogramming programs; and tracking hate incidents in the media.

Chair Levin seconded the update provided by Commissioner Choi and emphasized the importance of context in data analysis.

c. Subcommittee on Resources, Support, and Response

Updates provided by Commissioner Salcedo:

- Discussed improving law enforcement responses for individuals with mental health and developmental disabilities.
- Emphasized the need for better hate crime and incident reporting mechanisms across all law enforcement agencies.
- Highlighted discussions on bystander intervention training to support individuals facing hate.

d. Subcommittee on Community Forums

Updates provided by Commissioner Cuellar:

- Announced that the first community forum will focus on immigrant rights and will be held in May.
- Shared plans for a future community forum addressing hate in schools.
- Shared that the Subcommittee is focused on underrepresented communities in the forum planning.

Commission Discussion

Chair Levin thanked Commissioner Cuellar for her work on the community forums.

VI. Commission Member Announcements

Commissioner Roybal reminded everyone that Transgender Day of Visibility and Cesar Chavez are coming up.

Commissioner Salcedo announced the premiere of the film “Trillion Cut: Diamonds of Resilience” and the Walk for Humanity march.

Chair Levin announced personal commitments to impartiality as Chair.

Commissioner Salcedo requested the meeting be adjourned in honor of Linda Becerra Moran.

Public comment

A commenter shared that a California Association of Human Relations Organizations (CAHRO) online convening on April 2nd will focus on hate crimes.

Chair Levin shared as the commenter to share the details of the event.

Links Shared in the Chat:

<https://youtu.be/K4dtcBhvyZM?si=r7dKdncLzBi3lbTq>

VII. Future Agenda Items

Chair Levin reminded Commissioners to provide feedback on the Commission’s report.

VIII. Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda

Link Sent in the Chat:

<https://www.calhro.org>

IX. Adjournment of the Meeting

Commissioner Cuellar moved to adjourn the meeting; Commissioner Southers seconded.
The meeting adjourned at 11:51 am